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SUBJECT: DRC SENATE FINALLY SET TO ELECT LEADERSHIP

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The DRC Senate is set to hold elections for its seven leadership positions May 11, more than three months after senators were elected. President Joseph Kabila's former chief of staff is the leading candidate for the body's presidency, which would put him next in line to succeed Kabila. A former Mobutuist Prime Minister is the only other candidate. The political opposition, including Senator Jean-Pierre Bemba's MLC is not officially fielding candidates for any of the positions. End summary.

¶2. (U) The DRC's Senate will hold a secret ballot May 11 to elect its executive council, more than three months after the 108 senators were elected by the eleven provincial assemblies. There are 21 candidates running for the seven leadership positions of president, first and second vice presidents, rapporteur and deputy rapporteur, plus chief and deputy financial/administrative officers.

¶3. (SBU) There are two candidates running for the Senate presidency. The leading candidate is former Kabila chief of staff Leonard She Okitundu, representing the AMP, which holds the Senate majority with nearly 70 seats. Okitundu is being challenged by Leon Kengo wa Dondo, the former Mobutu-era Prime Minister. A third candidate, former Transition Senate president Monsignor Pierre Marini of the AMP, dropped out of the running May 10, helping to promote greater AMP unity in support of She Okitundu.

¶4. (U) Although the Senate is not considered the leading legislative body, with members indirectly elected, its president plays a potentially important role. According to the DRC's 2005 constitution, the Senate president is next in line to succeed the President on an interim basis, although his powers would be limited. The constitution states the successor may not name a new Prime Minister, military commanders or heads of parastatals, or remove judges.

¶5. (U) The political opposition is not officially running any candidates for the Senate leadership. Most of the 21 candidates are members of the AMP or independents. However, former UDPS official and pro-Bemba Union for the Nation (UpN) spokesperson Eve Bazaiba of the MLC is running for second vice president as an independent. Likewise, Kengo wa Dondo, although aligned with the UpN, is also running as an independent.

¶6. (U) Notable AMP candidates include: Edouard Mokolo wa Mpombo, former Mobutu-era intelligence official, ambassador and Information Minister who served as chairman of the Transitional Senate Foreign Relations committee, running for first vice president; Mario Losembe, an independence-era figure who served as ambassador and Minister of Education and

of Foreign Affairs under Mobutu, running for second vice president; and Modeste Mutinga, former chairman of the Transition-era High Media Authority, running for rapporteur.

17. (SBU) Comment: If party discipline holds, She Okitundu will win the Senate presidency. Rumors of vote-buying by both the AMP and Kengo are rampant, making firm predictions particularly difficult in a secret vote. However, the lack of any official opposition ticket is a strong indication that the vote will go in favor of the AMP slate. End comment.
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